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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 002122

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY EDGING BACK ON PRT/FSB

REF: A. (A) ROME 2115

[1](#)B. (B) USNATO 534

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM EMIL SKODON, 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. ITALY IS EDGING BACK FROM A COMMITMENT TO A PRT AND FSB IN AFGHANISTAN, PENDING GREATER CLARITY OF ITS ROLE IN POST-JUNE 30 IRAQ. WE ARE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT BERLUSCONI'S GOVERNMENT WILL EVENTUALLY JOIN A PRT - AND THINK AN FSB IS STILL NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION - BUT DO NOT EXPECT A FINAL DECISION BEFORE ADOPTION OF A NEW SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION AND PARLIAMENT'S EXTENSION OF ITALY'S DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) DCM, ACCOMPANIED BY POL-MIL COUNSELOR, MET ON MAY 27 WITH MFA SECRETARY GENERAL UMBERTO VATTANI AND ON MAY 28 WITH PM BERLUSCONI'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR, GIOVANNI CASTELLANETA. TOPICS INCLUDED PLANS FOR THE PRESIDENT'S JUNE 4-5 VISIT TO ROME, IRAQ (REF A), AND AFGHANISTAN, ON WHICH WE PUSHED AGAIN FOR ITALY TO JOIN A U.S.-LED PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM (PRT) IN HERAT AND TO TAKE THE LEAD IN STANDING UP A FORWARD SUPPORT BASE (FSB) IN WESTERN AFGHANISTAN.

[1](#)3. (C) CASTELLANETA, IN PARTICULAR, WAS LESS FORWARD-LEANING THAN HE HAD BEEN IN PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS. (ASKED BY AMBASSADOR SEMBLER TO CLARIFY BERLUSCONI'S POSITION ON PRT/FSB IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PM'S MAY 19 MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, CASTELLANETA HAD ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT ITALY WOULD ULTIMATELY RESPOND FAVORABLY TO BOTH PARTS OF THE U.S. REQUEST. HOWEVER, FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS, THE GOVERNMENT NEEDED TO WAIT UNTIL PARLIAMENT AUTHORIZED FUNDING FOR CONTINUING ITALY'S DEPLOYMENT BEYOND JUNE 30 WHICH, HE ARGUED, MUST IN TURN AWAIT FINALIZATION OF THE PENDING SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION.)

[1](#)4. (C) IN HIS MAY 28 MEETING WITH THE DCM, CASTELLANETA HEDGED EVEN MORE, CITING A NEED TO WAIT UNTIL COMPETING OVERSEAS REQUIREMENTS FOR ITALIAN TROOPS (BALKANS, IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN) ARE SORTED OUT. HE SAID ITALY MAY STILL BE ASKED TO MAKE ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL CONTRIBUTIONS IN IRAQ, SUCH AS FOR THE PROTECTION OF UN PERSONNEL AND MISSIONS. HE ALSO CITED A RECENT SUGGESTION AT NATO (REF B) THAT ITALY PROVIDE TWO NRF BATTALIONS TO BACKFILL U.S. TROOPS TAPPED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS. IN LIGHT OF THESE AND OTHER POTENTIAL DEMANDS, AND ITALY'S ALREADY STRETCHED CAPACITY TO FILL OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS, CASTELLANETA ARGUED THAT IT WAS PRUDENT FOR ITALY TO WAIT BEFORE COMMITTING TO THE PRT/FSB.

[1](#)5. (C) VATTANI PROVIDED MORE HOPE. CITING MOD ARGUMENTS THAT IT WOULD NEED ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR A PRT/FSB, VATTANI SAID THE MFA HAD IDENTIFIED A 50 MILLION EURO ACCOUNT WHICH MIGHT BE DRAWN FROM FOR THIS PURPOSE. (NB: WE BELIEVE THESE FUNDS WERE ORIGINALLY EARMARKED FOR CIV-POL PRT ACTIVITIES ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR GHAZNI; IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THEY COULD BE USED FOR THE STRICTLY MILITARY EXPENSES OF AN FSB.) VATTANI CRITICIZED NATO'S LIST OF FSB REQUIREMENTS AS EXTREME AND INFLEXIBLE. HE CALLED FOR A MORE MODEST DEFINITION OF FSB NEEDS, SINCE ADDITIONAL ASSETS WOULD BE AVAILABLE, IF NEEDED, FROM KABUL AND ITS ENVIRONS. (VATTANI ALSO CONFIRMED THAT HIGH-LEVEL RESISTANCE TO FSB CONTINUES AT THE MOD. HE VOLUNTEERED AT ONE POINT THAT CHOD DI PAOLA "MUST BE PUSHED" ON FSB.)

[1](#)6. (C) LIKE CASTELLANETA, VATTANI CITED CONTENDING DEMANDS FOR ITALY'S LIMITED NUMBER OF DEPLOYABLE FORCES, CALLING FOR MORE ASSISTANCE FROM THIRD COUNTRIES ON A BROAD ARRAY OF FRONTS. HE RAISED THE POSSIBILITY OF A JOINT FSB, NOTING THAT REQUESTS TO THE DUTCH AND TURKS FOR HELP HAD BEEN REBUFFED. CITING THE "NEED FOR QUIET" IN THE BALKANS, HE SAID ALLIES WERE PAYING TOO LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF THAT REGION. HE REQUESTED CONTINUED ASSISTANCE FROM THE U.S. TO PUSH OTHER ALLIES TO CONTRIBUTE FORCES IN KOSOVO, WHICH WOULD FREE UP ITALIANS (AND OTHERS) FOR OTHER OVERSEAS DUTIES. HE ALSO SPOKE OF THE NEED TO GARNER BROADER PARTICIPATION IN THE IRAQ MNF, ADDING THAT AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ ARE LINKED, AND THAT PROGRESS ON ONE FRONT CAN HELP SECURE PROGRESS ON THE OTHER.

[1](#)7. (C) FOR ALL THE CAVEATS, PRT AND FSB PREPARATIONS CONTINUE WITHIN THE ITALIAN BUREAUCRACY. WORKING LEVEL CONTACTS IN THE MFA INDICATE THAT BOTH PROPOSALS REMAIN VERY MUCH ON THE TABLE. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT ITALIAN MILITARY PLANNERS CONTINUE TO PREPARE FOR ACTUAL DEPLOYMENT OF A PRT AND FSB,

ALTHOUGH NO PRECISE DATES ARE UNDER DISCUSSION.

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